

GREENFORCE INITIATIVE:

Advancing Greener Careers

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As the national unemployment rate hovers around 9.6 percent, the nation, government, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors are making unprecedented investments in building a clean energy workforce for the emerging green economy. These workforce and technical investments will transform how Americans produce and use energy in response to the urgent need to address global warming, increase energy security, and stimulate economic recovery and growth. These investments will bolster a workforce that can help our nation become a world leader in energy and the environment.

A 2009 study found that the number of careers in America's clean energy economy grew nearly two and a half times faster than overall jobs between 1998 and 2007, growing at a national rate of 9.1 percent, while traditional jobs increased by only 3.7 percent between 1998 and 2007. Research also shows that clean energy investments at the level of about \$150 billion per year can generate around 1.7 million net new jobs throughout the economy, including nearly half that are accessible to workers with relatively low formal educational credentials.¹

With support from the Bank of America Charitable Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the National

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Wildlife Federation (NWF) and Jobs for the Future (JFF) formed the Greenforce Initiative. This two-year commitment will strengthen the capacity of community colleges to implement or refine quality pathways that lead to careers in the green sector.

Building on the combined experience of NWF and JFF in environmental sustainability and workforce development, respectively, the Greenforce Initiative will provide high-impact assistance to community colleges in targeted regions across the United States.

For those on the margins of our economy—lower-skilled and low-income workers and young adults, many from groups underrepresented in higher education—community colleges are the primary route to the family-supporting occupations and careers that the emerging green economy is generating. Campuses in the United States are engines of green career creation and hands-on training through onsite investments in efficiency, clean energy, water conservation, waste management, greener purchasing and transportation.

In fact, 195 community colleges have committed to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 through the *American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment*. At seven community colleges in California, Indiana, New Mexico, Texas, Hawaii,

Maryland and Oregon, a total of about \$600 million in green infrastructure investments are under way—including solar, geothermal and efficiency retrofits. Numerous community colleges are beginning to connect student learning to the greening of the campus, but one of the aims of the Greenforce commitment is to determine some of the best practices for dramatically shifting away from business as usual toward more sustainable strategies.

“While community colleges have emerged as the leading provider of training for green jobs, for many of them it is uncharted territory,” said Kerry Sullivan, president, Bank of America Charitable Foundation. “In working with both the National Wildlife Federation and Jobs for the Future, we saw an opportunity to introduce these organizations and have them collaborate to help rebuild the capacity and competitiveness of America’s workforce. By connecting graduates of community colleges’ environmental programs to the pipeline of available jobs, we are enhancing the economic and social health of the communities we serve.”

The goals of this program are to strengthen the capacity of colleges to develop, expand or refine green pathway programs that lead to postsecondary certificates or degrees, and employment in

family-sustaining green careers; the program is designed for lower-skilled adults and other nontraditional students who cannot currently access such programs.

“There are 1,200 community colleges in the United States, making them the nation’s largest job training, certification and preparation platform,” says Jack Litzenberg, senior program director at the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. “The Greenforce Initiative will capitalize on those schools’ strengths to help prepare low-income, low-skilled workers in Michigan and across the country for success in the global green economy.”

The Greenforce Initiative created “Learning and Action Networks” in six regions across the country, including Northern Virginia, South Texas, Metro Chicago, Michigan, North Carolina and Seattle.

Virginia

In Virginia, the Greenforce Initiative is on the ground in the northern region that includes community colleges in the D.C. metropolitan area and the Shenandoah Valley; there will also be a few participating schools from the Chesapeake Bay region. Three community colleges in this region are part of the Shenandoah Valley Energy Partnership, a coalition funded in part by the U.S. Department of Labor

to develop a program to train workers for jobs in the region's emerging green technology manufacturing and renewable energy industries.

Texas

In Texas, the Greenforce Initiative hosted a summit in McAllen, and focused on the Houston, San Antonio and South Texas region. The initiative is looking to support green job-training programs in this region that prioritize lower-skilled younger and older adults and the non-English speaking workforce, and help build strong employer partnerships for local economic development and entrepreneurial development.

Illinois

The Greenforce team partnered with the Illinois Green Economy Network (IGEN), with a focus on the Chicago region. IGEN includes all 48 community colleges in Illinois, and will eventually provide funding for sustainability coordinators at each campus who will focus on all aspects of sustainability—from campus operations to integrating sustainability into the curriculum. The Greenforce Initiative will bring a special focus on developing career pathways for lower-skilled adults and integrating campus sustainability efforts into the curriculum.

Michigan

The project is also collaborating with the Michigan Community College Association, coordinating with its Alternative Energy Consortium and the Breaking Through network. Michigan has the highest unemployment rate in the country. In an effort to address this economic crisis, Michigan's governor has created a high-level green jobs initiative through the Department of Labor's Energy and Economic Growth office. Greenforce is working with a network of schools that are interested in green job-training programs and campus sustainability efforts.

North Carolina

In North Carolina, the initiative is partnering with the Code Green Initiative of the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), an effort to advance sustainability on NCCCS campuses and in surrounding communities. The work of Code Green includes redesigning system-wide applied technologies curricula in the areas of energy, environment, building construction, transportation and engineering technologies. Our work in North Carolina will better meet the needs of students working to gain the knowledge, skills and experience they need to enter or advance in evolving or emerging green careers in these sectors.

Washington

Greenforce has partnered with the Skill UP Washington local workforce funder collaborative and the City of Seattle Economic Development Office; the partnership will work to engage community colleges in efforts to strengthen green career pathways for lower-skilled adults in this metropolitan area.

Greenforce Initiative Assistance

Drawing on the collective expertise of NWF and JFF, the initiative will provide assistance with:

- Engaging employers and connecting workforce development programs more strongly to their needs.
- Identifying emerging labor market needs in green sectors.
- Identifying and implementing promising and best practices in designing career pathways and supporting advancement.
- Identifying and implementing strategies for expanding access and opportunities for lower-skilled and nontraditional students.
- Promoting the integration of community colleges' sustainability efforts with their "green" workforce development and economic development activities.

- Leveraging state and federal funding opportunities to expand effective green pathway program designs for lower-skilled adults.
- Identifying and taking advantage of opportunities to influence state and federal policy agendas and funding support for this work.

Meeting a Need

Many current and future green jobs are jobs that require more than a high school diploma, but less than a bachelor's degree. Community colleges are well equipped to educate diverse populations and provide them with opportunities to participate in the emerging green economy. Forward-thinking institutions are moving ahead, educating men and women who can fill today's jobs and will be prepared to succeed in the green careers of the future. The demand for a clean energy economy is here, and community colleges must be prepared to equip people to enter the green workforce. The Greenforce Initiative will help community colleges meet this challenge while providing greater economic opportunities for underserved students. **I**

Endnotes

- 1 The Clean Energy Economy, The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2009. The Economic Benefits of Investing in Clean Energy, Center for American Progress; Department of Economics and Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2009.

Visit www.greenforceinitiative.org to learn more, and follow the initiative on Twitter @greenforce.

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